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ON PAGE 1A

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U.S. Retaliates, Ousts Nicaraguans *file only*

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WASHINGTON — In a stinging retaliation for the expulsion of three U.S. diplomats from Nicaragua, the United States Tuesday closed all six of Nicaragua's consulates and ordered the 21 diplomats who staffed them to leave the country.

The sweeping order announced by the State Department late Tuesday gave the six officers in charge of the consulates in Miami, New Orleans, Houston, New York, San Francisco and Los Angeles until 4 p.m. today to be out of the country. The other 15 diplomats — all members of the consular staffs — were given until Friday to leave. U.S. officials charged the consulates, which usually handle only routine affairs such as visa applications,

had been used for spying.

Diplomats and staff at the Nicaraguan Embassy in Washington were not affected by the order.

"The Nicaraguan government's precipitate action in expelling U.S. officials, giving them an unreasonably short deadline for leaving the country, and then the public show staged [in Managua] on June 6,

called in our opinion for a strong response," said Rush Taylor, a spokesman at the State Department.

"An important additional consideration was the Nicaraguan government's use of its consulates for intelligence operations," Taylor said.

He declined to elaborate on what type of intelligence activities the

consulates might be engaged in.

The expulsions were not intended "as a precursor to breaking diplomatic relations," the State Department spokesman said.

The response from Managua was predictable and harsh.

"This proves once again the arrogant and irresponsible attitude of the United States," said Daniel Ortega, junta coordinator and one of nine commanders on the Sandinista directorate.

"It fortifies the lines of confrontation, of war, of the bloodletting of Central America," Ortega said at a ceremony for the signing of an agricultural agreement between Cuban and Nicaragua.

Former Florida Sen. Richard Stone, now a presidential envoy charged with negotiating peace in

Central America, is scheduled to arrive in Managua Friday. Stone, who arrived in Venezuela Tuesday night, said he still will go to Nicaragua despite the diplomatic expulsions because there may be "a chance to come closer to peace."

Nicaragua on Monday had given three U.S. diplomats at the American Embassy in Managua 24 hours to leave the country, accusing them of plotting to harm — even kill — Foreign Minister Miguel D'Escoto with a bottle of "poisoned" Benedictine.

The three — Linda M. Pfeifel, a counselor for political affairs at the U.S. Embassy in Managua; David Noble Greig, a first secretary; and Ermila Rodriguez, a second secretary — returned to Washington Tuesday.

"I have only one thing to say: We categorically reject the absurd charges against us," Pfeifel told reporters during a brief stopover in Miami.

Manuel Cordero, minister counselor of the Nicaraguan Embassy in Washington, said his government will comply with the U.S. order closing the consulates and expelling their diplomatic officers. Cordero estimated the total number of Nicaraguans affected at "about 50 or 60 including small children."

But, complained Cordero, instead of retaliating the U.S. government should "investigate" the reasons for Nicaragua's expulsion of the American diplomats.

Cordero and Antonio Jarquin, the new Nicaraguan ambassador in Washington, were summoned to the State Department Tuesday afternoon and informed of the U.S. action by James Michel, the acting assistant secretary of state for inter-American Affairs.

The meeting lasted 25 minutes and was described by Cordero as one of "austere cordiality."

When Michel finished, said Cordero, "we reiterated our accusations" against the expelled American diplomats. "Mr. Michel then categorically denied our accusations."

A high-level Nicaraguan diplomatic source said that Ambassador Jarquin then delivered a "brief speech" to Michel stating the Nicaraguan government's position.

Jarquin reportedly told Michel that "countries and their leaders may disagree with each other, and often do, but that when crimes and murder are used as a political weapon, then this does become the affairs of a civilized country."

The Nicaraguan source said Michel interrupted Jarquin and sternly

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told him that he had not been summoned to discuss or debate the U.S. decision because it was final and irrevocable.

Jarquín, who has not yet presented his credentials to President Reagan, had no public comment on the State Department action. He arrived here three weeks ago to replace the former ambassador, Francisco Fiallos, who resigned due to political disagreements with the Sandinista government. Jarquín is to present his credentials June 16.

The latest incident in the deteriorating relations between the two countries surfaced early Monday when the Nicaraguans ordered the three U.S. diplomats expelled, accusing them of trying to "destabilize" the leftist Sandinista government.

Later in the day Lenin Cerna, the Nicaraguan government's security chief, called a news conference and specifically accused the three of involvement with a CIA "plot" to poison D'Escoto.

Cerna said they were caught when they tried to recruit Marlene Moncada, a consular secretary at the Nicaraguan Embassy in Tegucigalpa, Honduras who appeared at the press conference, to deliver a bottle of liquor to D'Escoto, a Maryknoll priest.

The United States denied the accusations.

But in Washington, congressional sources said the House Intelligence Committee will investigate the Nicaraguan charges "to make sure the CIA is not violating the prohibition on assassinations of foreign leaders."

Cordero told a news conference at the Nicaraguan Embassy that despite the worsening relations with the Washington, the Sandinista government "has absolutely no intention of breaking relations with the United States."

He also declared that the "exchange of expulsions" was not "the issue." He said the source of tensions between Nicaragua and the United States was "the covert war the Reagan Administration has undertaken against my government and my people."

The reference was to the covert CIA funding and other assistance anti-Sandinista forces based in Honduras and fighting the Managua regime. Only a few hours before the U.S. decision to close the Nicaraguan consulates was announced, the House Foreign Affairs Committee voted 20-14 to end the covert program.

"The real issue," said Cordero, "is that the American government is out to overthrow our government."